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THE
VOICE
OF THE
WORKER

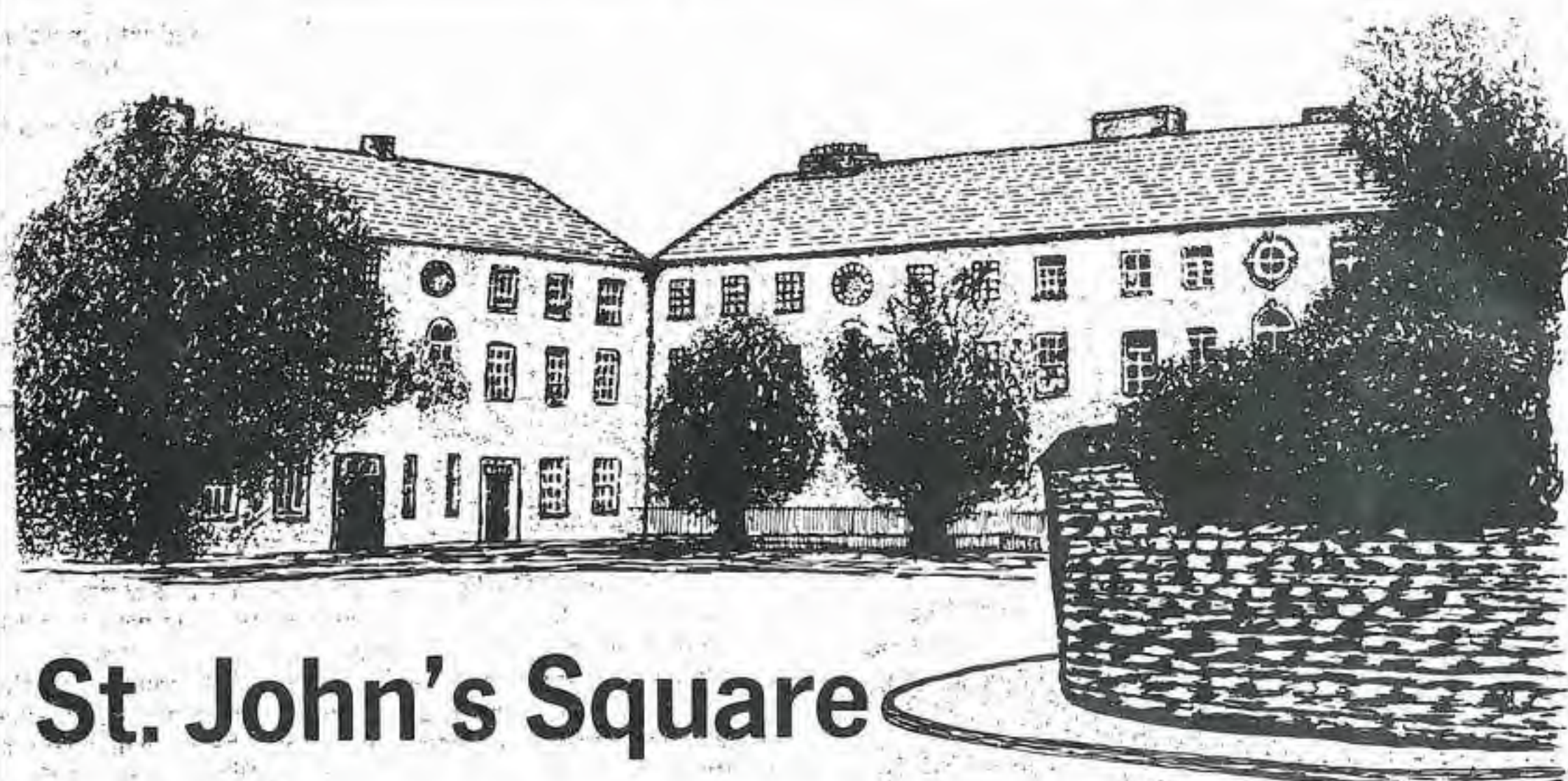
'That which is good for the working class I esteem patriotic . . .' *James Connolly*

Frank O'Connor's Limerick



PURITY BY BROWN PAPER

THE FERENKA STRIKE



St. John's Square

THE FERENKA FILE

SOME LETTERS OF THE DISPUTE

TO ALL EMPLOYEES

3rd October, 1977

Following last week's unofficial work stoppage your Company has found it necessary to again emphasise that it will not accept efforts to enforce solutions by actions outside of the procedures agreed between the Company and the Unions. Consequently, we have as on previous similar occasions, taken disciplinary action against persons who were seen to take a leading role in the unofficial picketing. The action is as follows:

1. The Chairman of the Shop Stewards Committee has been suspended pending an investigation by the Labour Court of his recent activities in relation to the unofficial stoppage. In deciding upon this action, we have borne in mind that the Labour Court in its report of 7th April, 1975 criticised the present Chairman, who was then a Shop Steward, for his persistent refusal to abide by agreed Union/Company procedures. The report recommended that a period of suspension and a final warning be imposed for the offence. In the events of last week the Chairman again demonstrated his unwillingness to follow agreed Union/Company procedures. This resulted in unnecessary financial loss to both employees and the Company.
2. A number of Shop Stewards who were positively identified as having taken part in the unofficial picket have been suspended for one week from the 3rd October, 1977, and have been given a Final Warning. This action has been carried out in accordance with the Works Rules. Similar action taken by the Company in previous such situations has been upheld by the Labour Court.

The Management of your Company wishes to emphasise that it remains available to discuss with authorised Union representatives any outstanding grievances or other matters of mutual interest.

Yours sincerely,
for Ferenka Ltd.
S. Coffey,
Industrial Relations Manager.

5th October 1977

The Chairman,
The Labour Court,
Department of Labour,
Mespil Road,
Dublin 4.

Re: Ferenka Limited, Annacotty, Co. Limerick:

Dear Sir,

I wish to advise that an unofficial stoppage is presently taking place in the above plant following the suspension of a number of shop stewards, members of the Irish Transport & General Workers Union.

The company wishes to inform the Labour Court that it is prepared to have the dispute processed through the Labour Court itself in accordance with procedures agreed with the Irish Transport and General Workers Union and contained in the company's Agreement with that union, provided that a return to work takes place in the meantime.

The company also believes that the Labour Court should proceed to have this matter attended to as soon as possible, in conjunction with the Irish Transport & General Workers Union.

Yours sincerely,
John Hartly,
Regional Secretary,
Federated Union of Employers,
Mid-West Regional Office.

7th October '77

TO EACH MEMBER (I.T.G.W.U.)

A Chara,

Your Union is seriously concerned at the loss of wages sustained by its members in Ferenka and the possibility that the Company may cease operations as a result of this dispute. We are anxious that resumption of work should take place as soon as possible so that the Union can continue negotiations with the Co. on outstanding claims and process the issues at present in dispute to the Labour Court. The Court has undertaken to make an Industrial Relations Officer available on Wednesday 12th October '77 from 9.30 p.m.

It is in everyone's interest that a resumption of work is effected as soon as possible. To this end a general meeting has been called for Tuesday 11th October '77 at 10 a.m. in Connolly Hall at 91, O'Connell Street, Limerick.

Is mise le meas,
Vincent P. Moran, P.C.,
Branch Secretary,
I.T.G.W.U.,
Limerick No. 2 Branch,
Ferenka Section.

11th October, 1977

Press Statement
Re: Ferenka Ltd.

The Executive Committee of the Marine Port and General Workers' Union, having given consideration to the many statements that are being made in connection with the Ferenka Dispute wish to propose the following:

- 1 That in order to remove any doubt of the accuracy of the wishes of the Production Workers of Ferenka to become members of this Union and to dispel once and for all the accusations that are being made that these workers were intimidated into seeking membership of this Union, the Marine Port and General Workers' Union are fully prepared to have this matter of Union Membership determined by a completely independent person who will conduct a meeting of the men and the holding of a ballot under his supervision.
- 2 This Union will be prepared to accept in advance the result of that Ballot.
- 3 In the meantime, so as to allow these proposals to proceed, we would be prepared to recommend to all parties a full resumption of work by all workers who were in the employment of the Company on Thursday, September 29, 1977.

Signed: SEAMUS REDMOND, General Secretary
Marine Port and General Workers Union.

14th October, 1977

Dear Member,

The Union's servicing arrangements at Ferenka have been under discussion for some time now with our Ferenka Section Committee. One of the proposals we put forward to the Section Committee earlier this year was that a separate I.T.G. & G.W.U. Branch be established at Ferenka, and we now wish to confirm our decision to do this.

Mr. Tom O'Dwyer has been appointed Secretary of the separate, full-time Branch at Ferenka and he will commence work in this capacity immediately. He will be arranging general meetings of our Ferenka membership to elect Branch Officers and a Branch Committee in accordance with the rules of the Union. In addition to working closely with the Ferenka

Branch Committee, Tom O'Dwyer will maintain liaison directly with the National Group Secretary concerned and Head Office.

We are confident that Tom O'Dwyer's experience as a former employee of Ferenka and former Chairman of the Ferenka Section Committee, allied to his ability will contribute to effective and beneficial servicing of the Ferenka membership. The National Executive Council of the Union wishes to point out that it will as usual continue to review the servicing arrangements at Ferenka in order to ensure that this meets the requirements and wishes of the I.T.G.W.U. members in Ferenka.

Yours sincerely,
Irish Transport & General Workers' Union,
Michael Mullen,
General Secretary.

14th October, 1977

Public Note

As you know, the Company has been beset by an unofficial work stoppage, lasting almost three weeks.

All through this period the Company has striven to bring about a resumption of work, and a return to normal procedures. Due to the heavy financial drain on the Company occasioned by the loss of production, together with the absence of any solution within sight, the Company feels that it must now issue protective notice of lay-off, as per the following categories:—

All Weekly-Paid Employees:

Two weeks notice of lay-off, expiring on Friday 28th October 1977.

Staff Employees in Salary Groups 8 to 13 inclusive:

One calendar month's notice of lay-off, expiring on 16th November 1977.

or

Three calendar months notice of lay-off, expiring on 16th January 1978 — as per individual contracts of employment.

All affected personnel will be notified by individual letter shortly.

Certain individual employees in all above categories, who carry out essential technical or administrative functions, will be exempted from this notice, and will be notified accordingly.

It is with reluctance, and regret, that the Company now takes this step, and we wish to assure you that we will continue to make every effort to ensure the viability of Ferenka, and the security of your employment, as soon as possible.

J.K. van Wijngaarden
Managing Director
Ferenka Ltd.

17th October, 1977.

Dear Employee,

As advised in the Public Note issued by the Managing Director, on 14th October, 1977, your Company has been forced to issue protective notice of lay-off, due to the continuing unofficial work stoppage.

In accordance with this, we regret to confirm that your Company will be unable to provide work for you after Friday 28th October, 1977, and that you will be laid-off at close of your normal working hours on that date.

Please be assured that in the meantime, we shall continue to make every effort to secure a resumption of work and a return to normal industrial relations procedures.

Yours sincerely,
for Ferenka Ltd.,
S. Coffey,
Industrial Relations Manager.

21st October, 1977.

Senator Fintan Kennedy,
General President,
Irish Transport & General Workers' Union,
Liberty Hall,
Dublin 1.

Dear Senator Kennedy,

I am advised that a closedown by the Ferenka plant in Limerick could be imminent unless a very early solution is found to the present labour problems. In these circumstances all of us must have regard to the jobs of the 1,400 people concerned and to the nationally damaging effect which the closure of a plant of this size would have on the country, both internally and externally. To try to avert such a situation, I have put together the enclosed proposals which I trust will be given very careful consideration and, with the full co-operation of all concerned, will provide the basis of a solution which will avoid a closure and result in a resumption of normal working. These proposals are being sent to the Marine, Port and General Workers' Union and to the Company.

If all the parties directly concerned would indicate that these proposals would form the basis for a settlement, then I would arrange for my Department to progress the matter further. I would like to hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,
Gene Fitzgerald
Minister for Labour.

24th October, 1977

Mr. R. Roberts,
General Secretary,
Irish Congress of Trade Unions,
19, Raglan Road,
Dublin 4.

Dear Mr. Roberts,

I enclose herewith copy of letter and enclosure re the Ferenka situation received from Mr. Gene Fitzgerald, T.D., Minister for Labour, together with copy of my reply.

In view of the serious issues which the Minister's proposals pose for Congress and all affiliated unions, I should appreciate it if you would place the whole question on the agenda of next Friday's Executive meeting as one requiring priority attention.

Yours sincerely,
Fintan Kennedy
General President.

24th October, 1977.

Mr. Gene Fitzgerald, T.D.,
Minister for Labour,
Department of Labour,
Mespil Road,
Dublin 4.

Dear Minister,

I have discussed with my National Executive Council your letter of the 21st instant and enclosure regarding the position in Ferenka in Limerick and we all appreciate your interest in the matter.

Like you, we are very concerned about the future of the plant and of the workers employed in it. We are anxious to assist towards an early and full resumption of work. However, what we can do must be consistent with the facts of the situation which we set out very briefly as follows:

- 1 There is no industrial dispute between this Union and Ferenka.
- 2 All our clerical, technical and supervisory members are at work. So too are a number of our production members. We are satisfied that many others have not reported for work

(continued on Page 5)

ST. JOHN'S SQUARE

Limerick was still a fortified city when John Purdon and Edmond Sexton Pery started work on the building of St. John's Square. This was just sixty years after the Treaty, and these were people still alive who had vivid recollections of the horrors of the sieges. Many of the wealthy proprietors who resided there from the beginning owed much of their wealth to the plunder of native properties during that turbulent period in the history of Limerick.

Some authorities tell us that the square was set out in an open space west of St. John's Church. This was meant to imply that an open space existed there at that time, and that there was nothing to do but build the great stone houses around it. In reality there was no open space in the Irishtown. The wealthy families who sought spacious and luxurious town houses made sure that there was no congestion, so it is certain that a number of old dwellings were demolished before the foundations of the square were laid out. But despite this clearance, the aristocratic residents could not avoid the daily sight of the teeming masses of the poor in the warren of lanes all around the backs of the houses. The square houses were occupied mainly during the winter months. The contrast between the opulence of the few wealthy families and the squalor of the huddled poor was stark and immutably fixed.

Originally the square was made up of eight houses, in perfect symmetrical order. Some time afterwards two additional houses were added, one at each side. Although these were much larger than the others, and had a superior finish in cut stone, they fitted exactly into the original pattern. The houses were afterwards numbered 1 to 5 on each side, that is, the numbers were duplicated and starting at the narrow entrance to Gerald Griffin Street.

Even to-day the square stands as a monument to the genius and enterprise of Edward Sexton Pery. It was the forerunner of his great scheme for developing the city into a more modern and open format — an ideal that found full expression in the magnificent streets of New Town Pery.

One cannot help feeling that this great architect was centuries ahead of his time. He gave us the fine thoroughfares that are catering for to-day's chaotic traffic, while in recent times the Limerick Corporation gave us Farranshane Road, where even the pedestrians must sometimes walk in Indian file.

There can be no doubt that the great expanse of the Square, with its striking contrast with all other areas in the old city, was due to the foresight of Pery who, from the very beginning, appears to have cultivated a remarkable hatred of the narrow and cluttered up thoroughfares of the city.

Pery and Purdon each took a house for themselves in the square. The others were let out at £32 per annum. Among the early tenants were Vere Hunt from the fairyland of Curraghchase, William Monsell, Tervoe, Rev. William Cecil Pery, Alexander Franklen, Ambrose Wilson, Caherconlish, Dorothea Crump, Catherine Rose and Richard Borough.

It is interesting to note that Dorothea Crump, widow of General Crump, was afterwards married to William Cecil Pery. Pery succeeded his father in the vicarage of St. John's, and became Bishop of Limerick. He was afterwards created Lord Baron Glentworth of Mallow. He was the first to reside in the new Bishop's Palace in Henry Street. He has the unique distinction of being remembered in three of our principal streets — Glentworth Street, Mallow Street, and Cecil Street — surely a record for any town or city in Ireland.

That the owners of beautiful country mansions could leave their exotic gardens and parklands to dwell in the fetid and fever laden atmosphere of the eighteenth century Irishtown would be hard to explain if one was not aware of the pains that most people will endure to satisfy the demands of human vanity. To own a town house was the "in thing" in those days, and such a circumstance was sufficient to swell up one's pride to the first magnitude.

In response to requests from a number of our readers we publish below a chapter on St. John's Square by Kevin Hannan from his historical work in progress "Garryowen and Glory".

With the development of the new town on the high ground overlooking the Shannon the resident in the square became restive, and soon the exodus began from the drab atmosphere of the Irishtown to the more fashionable New Town Pery.

Sam Dixon remained on to start a dyeworks at the rear of his residence, No. 5, on the south side. Standing with one's back to the churchyard gate, his was the end house on the left hand side. Charlie Unthank, son of the famous Joshua Unthank of Mungret Street, was appointed resident manager of this industry, and in due course became the owner. Up to recent years the rear entrance to this house at Brennan's Row, where there was a blacksmith's forge (Paddy O'Neill's), was known as the "Dye-house".

Around this period Dr. John Geary, when discussing living conditions (between 1786 and 1792) refers to "the appalling conditions of a dwelling near Miss Tucker's brewery in John's Square". The only house in the square having a dwelling close up to it was No. 5 on the north side (Corcoran's). Miss Tucker's brewery must have occupied the rear of this house. As far as can be ascertained the name of Tucker does not occur in the list of tenants of No. 5 South, which was also close to other dwellings at Chapel lane (now Canter's Range). Furthermore, it was unlikely that a dye works and a brewery could be accommodated in the one back yard.

A detachment of the garrison took over No. 2 on the south side and built a new wing at the rear and a fine cut stone entrance at Barrack Lane. The military moved out when the new barracks were completed in 1798 (now the Sarsfield Barracks).

No. 3 on the north side (now the men's Hostel) became the Church of Ireland rectory for St. John's parish. The magnificent Georgian doorway of this house, together with the lamp standard — a reminder of the days when wealthy householders provided their own street lighting — were additions made, perhaps, by the Church Body. The original doors of these houses were drab and plain without any form of ornamentation. More than one observer suggested that they were more like back doors than front doors.

The last rector to reside here was Rev. Canon Langbridge, an Englishman of letters, who was well loved by all classes and creeds in the parish — and far outside it. The Rev. Langbridge, who spent most of his life in Limerick, was a man of high literary talents, and was the author of a number of books of short stories and poems. It is regrettable that none of his poetry relates to his adopted city. These long out of print works — many of outstanding merit, are mainly lyrics inspired by the plight of the hawkers and street musicians of the London of his day. He collaborated with Sir Martin Harvey in dramatising "A Tale of Two Cities". This remarkable work titled "The Only Way", was loudly acclaimed in literary circles, and enjoyed a widespread popularity for many years. One of his two daughters, Rosamund, was also a gifted writer, and had a least one novel published, but, unfortunately, we know very little about it, except that it was banned by The Limerick Carnegie Library Committee, a circumstance which need not reflect in any way on the author, as the Committee in those years was made up of some diehard puritans.

When he first took up residence in the square the Canon was advised by an old clergyman to take precautions against attack by the savage and superstitious natives. Indeed his adviser, who apparently had no time for the common people of the parish, suggested the fitting of iron grills on the windows of the rectory.

The Canon, disregarding these overtures, mixed freely with the local people with whom he became a great favourite. That he was held in the highest regard by all classes was proved during the riots which followed an anti-Home Rule meeting held in the Theatre Royal. On that infamous occasion the homes and business premises of many Protestants had their windows and doors smashed. Even the Protestant Churches did not escape the fury of the mob. But the Canon in St. John's Square was not forgotten by the people amongst whom he lived. The members of St. John's Temperance Society mounted guard outside the Rectory, and also patrolled the grounds of the Churchyard, to insure the protection of the Church against sacrilege.

Further proof of the high regard in which he was held was forthcoming when his salary as Church of Ireland Chaplain to the Mental Hospital was increased through the influence of the priests of the parish. He died in 1922 and is buried in St. John's Churchyard a few feet from the door of the Church.

As the years rolled by some of the houses were let out to some substantial middle class tenants, many of whom sub-let to others. In due course the houses on the south side, with the exception of No. 1 and No. 2, became working class tenements, as did No's 1 and 2 on the north side. No. 4 on the north side was a tenement for a time up to about sixty years ago when it once again became a private dwelling.

The ground floor and basement of this house, which is now the headquarters of St. John's Catholic Boy Scouts, was in the possession of Haslebeck around the turn of the century. Haslebeck a German who had emigrated from Manchester, engaged in the then little-known craft of sausage and pudding making. He was a man of remarkable business acumen and carried on his trade in the cellar.

It was his custom on Friday nights to invite all the heads of households in the upper part of the house to William Wheeler's public house next door (now Corcoran's butcher shop) and buy two drinks for each.

When the local bacon factories began to produce sausages on a large scale Haslebeck, adapted his business to the manufacture of sausage casings. This trade was still being carried on by the family up to recent times.

Up to the end of the twenties No. 1 south was owned by St. John's Temperance Society. At that time they moved to the commanding officer's house at the Ordnance Barracks in Mulgrave Street. The last privately owned house on the south side was No. 2, and was owned by John Cross, whose brother Joe carried on a funeral undertaking business at Barrack Lane. The Cross family have always held a high place in the esteem of the citizens, and are noted for their honesty and fairness in their dealings with the public.

Those of the houses which had been let as tenements gradually fell into decay, and when the tenants were rehoused, in the fifties and sixties, there were six ruined houses left in the square. The vandals moved in like pirannas and completed the work of destruction. Nothing was left but the shells, there being no market for old stones.

By the early seventies the old square was all but dead. There was still some life on the north side, but for the passer by it was a lonesome place, full of ghosts and sadness, for what evokes our saddest thoughts more than the abandoned habitation of man?

In 1962 Plunghead O Ceallachain, the then City Architect, reported on the condition of the square. His recommendations were as follows:

(1) *In view of the uniqueness and of the intrinsic architectural qualities of St. John's Square, it is considered well worthy of preservation, both in the interest of Limerick and in the national interest.*

(2) *St. John's Square is sufficiently small to be capable of preservation without exorbitant expenditure.*

(3) *I recommend that every effort be made to preserve St. John's Square, and that favourable consideration could be given to the reconstruction of six houses in the square to provide residential accommodation.*

These recommendations were not acted upon for more than

a decade and in the meantime building costs had risen considerably. Eventually a private developer tackled the ruins on the south side, while the Corporation began restoration work on No's 1 and 2 on the north side. This was to be Limerick's contribution to European Architectural Heritage Year, and what a worthy one it was.

Happily the restoration of the square is secure. Four houses on the south side are now in occupation, and the lighted windows during the winter nights make a warm and welcome sight. There is still much work to be done on three houses, but at least they are occupied, and the danger of demolition is past. Work on No's 1 and 2 north is drawing to a close, and the thorough job carried out here ensures the preservation of the buildings for the next five hundred years.

Soon the traffic that is now thundering through the square will be canalised from the new road through John Street, Sean Heuston Place, and into Gerald Griffin Street. Pedestrian traffic only through cobbled pathways, will further restore some of the pristine splendour of the place. The whole project is a heartening indication that other important links with the past will not be lightly obliterated.

CONFRATERNITY BELL

What was once
The rallying bell,
Final whistle
Of unfinished matches,
Signal to withdraw
From a kiss,
Holy gong that drew me
Like a magnet uphill
Past dog-eat-dog
Housing estate,
Cat-wired
Barrack railing,
Cherry blossomed
Footpaths
Soft as carpets
Leading
To the power and glory
Of a thousand candles
In a packed church . . .

Is now the bell
I no longer heed,
Less than holy gong
That made me ponder
The wickedness
Of a kiss,
Declared
My every innocent act
A sin,
Haunted
My every search
For different shades
Of black and white,
Prevented
What could have been
The music of angels
In my heart.

JOHN LIDDY

(continued from Page 3)

because of intimidation, fear or misunderstanding.

- 3 In no way is this Union or its members at work preventing a full resumption of work. On the contrary, we are continuing to exert every effort to effect such a full resumption.
- 4 We shall continue to represent and accord service to our members in the plant in accordance with their and our rights under the Constitution of this State and with the rules and regulations of the Union and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions.

It is a matter of regret to us that despite the facts of the situation the media and many prominent public personages continue to represent the impasse in Ferenka as resulting from an inter-union dispute. This is not so and has never been so. The dispute is the direct result of the action of the management of Ferenka in suspending seven workers. Consistent with these facts, we are prepared to discuss the matter with you at any time if you feel that this would serve any useful purpose. We repeat, however, that there is no industrial dispute between this Union and Ferenka and that we are already doing everything in our power to effect an early and full resumption of work.

In view of the major adverse effect your proposals would have on the whole position of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, we are asking that body to consider the matter forthwith.

Yours sincerely,
Fintan Kennedy
General President.

FRANK O'CONNOR'S LIMERICK

PART TWO

In September 1945 Frank O'Connor completed the writing of his now out of print book *Irish Miles* and it was published in London two years later. The work is an account of cycling trips to various parts of the country by the Cork writer and his first wife Celimene. Travelling up from his native county they crossed the Limerick border and reached Kilmallock. In recent years this town has made claims to being aware of its architectural heritage and the writings of Mannix Joyce have strengthened its reputation. But thirty years ago O'Connor had a different tale to relate and his caustic criticisms appear to be well justified:

There is a picture in the Dublin National Gallery which shows what Mulvaney saw there a hundred years ago: a street of three-storey fortified Tudor and Jacobean houses which Irish people still call 'castles'. The street has now entirely disappeared. A few months before we passed through it the last good example of the Irish fortified house was torn down to make way for a modern cinema. In the ruined gable was a fine stone Tudor fireplace. Nobody in Kilmallock even wanted that. But as the inhabitants are all intensely patriotic (is it not Mr. De Valera's homeland?) they have called the cinema 'The Sarsfield'. In Limerick there is a public-house which with the same appropriateness is called 'The Father Mathew', after the apostle of temperance. At the end of the town there is a dilapidated furniture shed with some metal advertisements for Raleigh bicycles nailed outside it. From the arched doorways you may just be able to identify all that remains of the last of the old Kilmallock houses.

O'Connor goes on to describe more of the town's neglect of its many historic buildings. He concludes this chapter by contrasting Kilmallock's record with the care and conservation of the Adare people. As well as shattering Kilmallock's claim to have preserved its architectural heritage, the piece exposes some of the cultural and spiritual poverty of Irish provincial life.

To realise what has happened in Kilmallock, you need to know Adare, a few miles away. Adare, too, is a Desmond stronghold. There is the same river and the same pastures, the same view of the tower on the river-bank, but at one side of the bridge the Augustinian monastery has been turned into the most charming parish church imaginable; at the other side, the fine, squat, battlemented tower of the Trinitarian monastery marks the Catholic church, while the ruined Franciscan monastery on the golf-course is so beautifully kept that it is a pleasure to wander about it, to watch the patterns of shadow that the sun makes among the piers or see the tall tower through the intersecting mullions of a ruined window. It is only there you realise the almost incredible achievement of Kilmallock, the one-time capital of Desmond. At the time Mulvaney painted it, it had, in spite of the ruins, the richest past in Munster. Today it has practically none. The Fitzgerald tombs rot under the open sky within the parish church, while the Protestants repair to their new church on the hill, the Catholics to their grand Gothic Church, and all of them, the last of their historic houses demolished, to see Hollywood films in a cinema called after Patrick Sarsfield. One glance at that dying hole, and you can understand the dreariest of Mr. De Valera's political manifestos. With a synthetic religion and a synthetic culture, what is there left but abstractions?

In the next chapter O'Connor examines the topography of the city of Limerick. Despite his brash, irreverent style, it is clear that, deep down, he had a warm appreciation of its many old buildings. His views on its people, however, remained unchanged and predictable:

Limerick is without exception the pleasantest town in Ireland. It consists of two towns, the old and the new, but as the new was built about the beginning of the last century, the

old has grown almost reconciled to it. In the new town the pretty Custom House, with its arcade cemented up by some genius from the Board of Works, and a fine long street of Late Georgian which ends rather feebly, in a frightened double crescent. Shop fronts do less to spoil the street than the Renaissance church in Ruabon brick and the neo-Clonmacnois one in limestone. Limerick as well as being the pleasantest is also the most pious town in Ireland. Why it should be I don't know, except that it was founded by Danish pirates, whose flaxen hair, blue eyes and bad consciences still walk the streets.

After describing King John's Castle and St. Mary's Cathedral, O'Connor moved up the river to Castleconnell. "Black" Jack Fitzgibbon's Mountshannon House continued to hold a strong attraction for him and was his main reason for this visit. He gives a haunting melancholy account of his approach to that ruined house:

Castleconnell is a delightful Georgian spa with its arched assembly rooms on the bank of the Shannon, its charming inn, its rows of demure little villas. Towards the end of the nineteenth century some patriot got at them and gave them wroughtiron gates, representing Irish round towers, harps, wolf-dogs, and the Treaty Stone by Thomond Bridge, but even these do little more than emphasise the quiet decorum of the houses behind. Unfortunately, since then it has been visited, by another type of patriot. During Mr. De Valera's rebellion some of the great houses along the river perished; under his government; the housebreakers have been gradually accounting for the rest. We returned from Castleconnell along the back road just at sunset. Miles of stone wall which guarded the estate on our right were humped and rent by great clumps of ivy which straddled them and broke their back. We opened a ruined gate and cycled down a shadowy lane which had once been an avenue, and rounded a great mass of buildings which proved to be stables. Suddenly as we reached the stable yard, the sun went out over the wild Clare hills across the river, and we looked up and saw in the yellow light the green, peeling stucco behind a great Ionic front, reflecting like water the last pale gleam of the day. It would be impossible to paint that yellow light on the peeling stucco and the dull smouldering of the masses of brick in the gloomy cavern of the house behind, but it was tremendous . . . It must have been an enormous house . . . Stumbling in the dusk along the length of the wall, we came on a peculiar mound, almost covered with briars, and now almost unnoticeable in the desolation. There was an opening into it . . . The lock was broken; we opened the gate and looked in. Three steps led down into the darkness. I lit my lighter, and the flare showed us three discoloured coffins on a slab under the broken wreaths.

Later on another journey making their way down to Limerick O'Connor and his wife reached Killaloe. The lure of Limerick was a powerful one and despite the late hour they decided to push on towards the city. There was a strange sight awaiting them at the end of their journey, and all O'Connor's feelings — and prejudices — on Limerick were about to be vindicated.

Nature, as I say, is all very well in its own way, but it produces a ravenous appetite for civilisation, and Killaloe, after all, was only thirteen or fourteen miles from Limerick. You could smell it up the Shannon; the Georgian architecture, the lights, the hotels, the pubs, the picture-houses and the resiners . . . We passed Georgian mansions, orchards and nursery gardens, and at last we came in the dusk to the familiar bridge guarded by its grey drum towers, and above it the skinny old cathedral tower stood up against the sky, bleak and blue-grey and all old-maidish in its curling papers of battlements. As we

THE FERENKA STRIKE

The Ferenka strike is the biggest dispute in the history of industrial relations in Limerick. The affair has received widespread publicity in the national press, radio and television. After all the welter of words in articles and programmes the dispute can be reduced to one essential question: have the workers the right to change unions if they wish to do so and to opt for the union of their choice?

The background to the strike is now well known. Briefly told, it shows that the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union negotiated a closed shop agreement with Ferenka before the factory opened, over five years ago. In that time fifteen strikes took place at the plant, all of them without the official sanction of the I.T.G.W.U.

The main complaint of the workers is that the I.T.G.W.U. has not given them adequate service. With union dues being stopped by the company under the "check-off" system, it is estimated that the union had been receiving about £20,000 a year from the workers employed in the factory. The branch secretary dealing with Ferenka was Vincent Moran, who also had a variety of other firms to deal with. The workers claim that their overall financial contribution to the union merited a better back-up for their claims.

The dispute also highlights the closed shop type of agreements being operated by the I.T.G.W.U. in factories throughout the country. Critics of these agreements say that these deals are carried out with the assistance of the Industrial Development Authority and the Federated Union of Employers. Other unions also have closed shops on a much smaller scale to the I.T.G.W.U. The number of closed shops being operated by the Transport Union has increased rapidly in recent years. This policy further poses a serious threat to the survival of many unions, including craft ones.

Another criticism made against the I.T.G.W.U.'s record in Ferenka is that it was acting as a "policeman" in carrying out the company's policy. Many workers believe that the union's views were far too close to Ferenka's and that both sides worked in tandem on many issues. This widespread belief was a factor in many of the stoppages in the plant over the last five years.

During a meeting, called to consider the present strike, the vast majority of production workers in the plant decided to leave the I.T.G.W.U. and join the Marine Port and General Workers' Union. The Transport Union refused to allow this transfer of its membership and the matter has been deadlocked for the past month. The issue that sparked off the strike was the suspension of the workers' chairman and six shop stewards.

The feelings of the striking workers have been further inflamed by the statements of John Carroll, vice-president of the I.T.G.W.U. and Vincent Moran. The shouting and bullying tactics of Carroll has discredited the whole Irish trade union movement. The "starve them back" statement by Moran was an incredible speech from a union official.

There is a remarkable contrast between the attitude of the I.T.G.W.U. to the Ferenka workers before the decision to join the Marine Port Union and after this decision was taken. On

the morning on which the minority of workers who had remained with the I.T.G.W.U. went back to work a dozen full-time officials, led by the Mayor of Limerick, Councilor Frank Prendergast, led these workers into the plant.

After this the I.T.G.W.U. was a union in panic. The decision to give Ferenka a branch of its own was rushed forward. A fulltime official was appointed to serve the factory production members only. Another fulltime official was brought from Dublin to look after the supervisory and clerical workers and Frank Prendergast, the Shannon branch secretary, was appointed regional secretary over all Clare and Limerick branches.

But these background manoeuvres will do nothing to solve the Ferenka problem. The I.T.G.W.U. cannot continue to fly

TURN AGAIN, LIPPER

The ITGWU and others who claim to represent the workers of the country are very quick to show that they are not concerned in the advancement of the ordinary worker when it comes to a crunch. When the organisations continue to do their best to knife me in the back, I will continue to expose them for what they are – and I will name them if necessary.

Too many are scared to express their views because they might offend certain political bigwigs. They have reason to fear these bigwigs, because if you are not for them, your life could be made hell on earth. The reign of fear which has lasted for so long must be ended. I am referring to the reign of terror spread in politics by those who have lived by threats and underhand methods that provide the material for a political scandal that would shock the whole of Ireland.

Alderman Michael Lipper, I.T.G.W.U. member and now Labour Party TD for East Limerick, 10th June, 1977.

in the face of reality. It is clear to anyone who looks objectively at the situation that there is substantial support among the vast majority of workers for membership of the Marine Port and General Workers Union.

The solution to the dispute must be based on this fact. There is no reason why both unions cannot serve the Ferenka workers. While the I.T.G.W.U. will find it difficult to swallow this solution swallow it it must.

There is one positive aspect of this bitter internecine struggle. For too long the I.T.G.W.U. has had a total monopoly among general workers in the Limerick area. It has not used its strength and money to advance the interests of workers as well as it might have. The days of the complacency are over for the I.T.G.W.U. Despite the fact that the Marine Port Union cannot match its rival union in terms of money and research facilities, its arrival in Limerick is certain to galvanise the Transport Union to provide a better service for all its other members in the area. And above all else, the Ferenka workers have fought for their fundamental and democratic right to opt for the union of their choice.

cycled by it Celimene suddenly jumped off her bicycle and shouted to me to stop. She stood before a hoarding with her eyes popping out.

'What is it?' I cried in alarm.

'Don't you see?' she cried in a frenzy of excitement.

'No' I said.

'The poster!'

'What's wrong with the poster?' I asked.

'Her chest, man', shouted Celimene. 'Can't you look at her chest!'

And there it was, with another poster beside it that said 'Every Poster Tells Its Story' – the picture of the Icilma lass, with a modesty vest of brown paper pasted across her pretty chest!

'Civilisation?' I thought, going cold all over. Did I say

civilisation?'

"Out of sight – out of mind" was obviously the intended moral of this scene. The hoarding, across the road from St. Mary's Cathedral, was considered an "occasion of sin" from which "bad" thoughts could only result. Frank O'Connor shook off his fatigue at the end of his long day's journeyings and captured the scene forever in his picture captioned "Purity By Brown Paper". The identity of the intrepid if misguided Limerickman who climbed the hoarding is not now known. But the action of the forgotten man who poasted the piece of brown paper over the ever so peeping cleavage of the Icilma girl, as she shyly displayed her beauty creams and face powder wares, tells us much about the sexual mores of the Limerick of the day.

(To be continued).

FIGURES OF SPEECH

ON THE run-up to the Election Fianna Fail proclaimed at every after-Mass meeting that the true total of unemployed was 150,000; some speakers put it at 160,000. Now the figure accepted by Fianna Fail in *Government* is the Central Office of Statistics figure of 106,000, which is about 1,000 less than the official total of the unemployed offered to us by the Coalition Government. So 44,000 or 54,000 people have been found jobs by Jack — or is it Martin — since the votes were counted. I don't believe it.

Now I do not know the true figure of the unemployed, but I think it is disgraceful that the unemployed should be tossed around as a mere statistic to get a party into office. There are certain figures, however, that can be accepted. They're official; they're obvious; they're on the books: the amount being paid out in Unemployment Benefit is less since Fianna Fail got into Government. Any unemployed man will explain this to you even if you're not all that numerate. After 12 months without a job Benefit and Pay-Related Benefit cease and those people who have been thrown on the scrap-heap by our Christian society become, largely, entitled to Assistance. A married man with two children who has been drawing Benefit of something less than £28 a week now draws Assistance of less than £24. Does his family eat less that first £24 week? The answer is obviously 'yes', and as prices keep going up, the answer is a firmer 'yes'. But has the family appetite decreased? No, of course, but the figures look good on the Fianna Fail books. And that's what matters.

SHORTLY before Dr. Newman left for Australia to see to the Church's interests there he addressed the Limerickmen's Association in London. Ireland, he said, was about to enjoy a great era of prosperity; it would soon be the most prosperous country in Europe. How soon the bishop did not say. Apparently, it is not to be all that immediate because before he left for London and the Antipodes he made a plea in Limerick to the Government to have the dole benefits increased.

Dr. Newman is no economic futurist nor is it his function to be one. Unfortunately his pie in the sky is not new. Limerick people have had it all before: didn't Dev and Lemass tell us that there would be so much prosperity here we'd have to call the emigrants home to fill the jobs that would be a-begging? It has for several generations been jam tomorrow, jam yesterday but never jam today, or as my grandmother used to say, 'Live horse — and you'll get grass!'

The sad fact is that even for people who are lucky enough to be in employment the capitalist system ensures that they do not get anything like a fair share of what's going. A sample of this system at work, which should be of interest to every local official, teacher, university lecturer, engineer, small shopkeeper, is this year's FACT: farm incomes are, at EEC prices, going up by 35 per cent, but wages and salaries must not go up by more than 5 per cent for if they do, say Colley, O'Donoghue and Jack, our prosperity is in peril. Whose prosperity?

BUT let's leave the silly Irish — that is to say those Irish people like myself who are criminal enough to be socialists — and take a peep at how they order affairs in France. Now that's a country that has everything — coal in the Nord, lush dairy products in Normandie, rice, tobacco, vines, peaches in the Sud: you name it, they grow it. And plenty brains at the top, the products of the *grands ecoles*. Oddly, unlike Martin O'Donoghue and Dr. Newman in their assessment of Ireland, they don't see prosperity round the corner.

After another summer's crop of school and college leavers

BY DERMOT MCEVOY

well over half a million *young* people are out of work in France; two out of three of the unemployed under-25s are women. In spite of 'crash' programmes to give them more jobs their number is growing faster than ever before. The Government admits that it has on its books an excess of job-seekers over jobs of 1.2 million; the trade unions say the figure is 1.6 million. As in Ireland, the Right insists that the young people 'don't want to work nowadays' and talks of 'luxury loafers'. The young unemployed who do benefit from various schemes get between 12 francs (£1.40) to 26 francs (£3.) a day but they're scarcely pampered (you wouldn't get one meal for that top allowance in any of the bistros I visited this year and I'm not thinking of the Tour d'Argent where a gourmet lunch can set you back £30).

Things are so bad there that there are no more work permits for foreigners and every immigrant willing to go home is being offered £1,200 to get the hell out of the country. They've tried employment schemes, bribing employers a la Mick O'Leary. And what did the employers do? They promptly sacked staff to take them on again or replace them with others, under new or more advantageous schemes. Alain Ginot, head of the biggest trade union (CGT) youth wing, said, 'The scheme has brought huge profits to a number of firms'.

Britain is in the same mess and so is that other great capitalist giant, the U.S. of A. Do you still think that Capitalist lackeys like Jack and Martin and George can do better for Ireland with its poverty of resources than all the others with their overplus of wealth are doing for their countries? If you do, you'll be proved wrong.

Only the urban working-class is suffering at present. They'll be joined soon by the more vocal middle-class whose well-educated Johnnys and Bridgets will have nowhere to go. When that happens, as happen it must, we'll hear less talk then about loafers on the dole and perhaps we'll be that much less excited about the necessity of even the value of sending Herbert-Scherberts to Brussels or Luxembourg at £30,000 a year for five years tax-free.

NORMALLY I shun 'national' issues. My view is that Northern Ireland is a foreign country and, apart from wishing the people there well and hoping they'll live in peace, I would leave them alone. This, of course, is not the view of many of my countrymen, a majority for all I know. Recently, I suggested in the correspondence columns of the *Irish Times* that if there is a majority in the Republic in favour of a united Ireland they would consider:

Change in slogan 'Brits Out-Peace In' (doubtful, at any rate debatable) to 'Brits Out — Unemployed Orange Bigots In', even 'Unemployed Orangemen In' (provable) and, if there is still a majority, my countrymen are more charitable than I've found'em to be, certainly more than I am.

So next time you meet your local friendly Provo, Stickie, IRSP man, member of Sinn Fein The Workers' Party, or indeed your local friendly Fianna Fail shade of Republican, invite him to comment on my new slogan. Perhaps he'll tell you that bigotry will vanish in a united Ireland? You are, of course, free to believe him. Meanwhile, from that organ of Orange opinion the *Protestant Telegraph*, which someone sent me anonymously, I extract these ecumenical words by the Rev. Dr. Paisley referring to the new Archbishop of Armagh: 'So strongly is the new Primate committed to a Roman Catholic Gaelic Ireland that he changed his name from 'Fee' to the Irish 'O'Fiaich' (Pronounced 'Oh Fake').'

It takes all sorts to make a united Ireland.